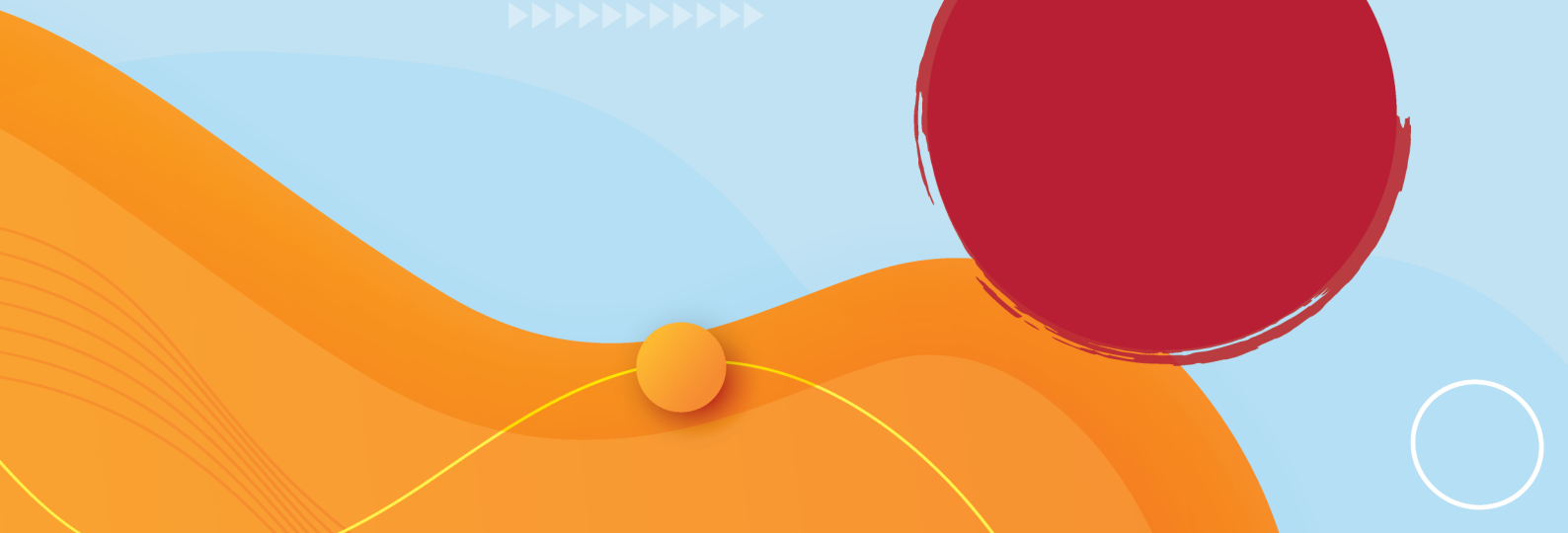
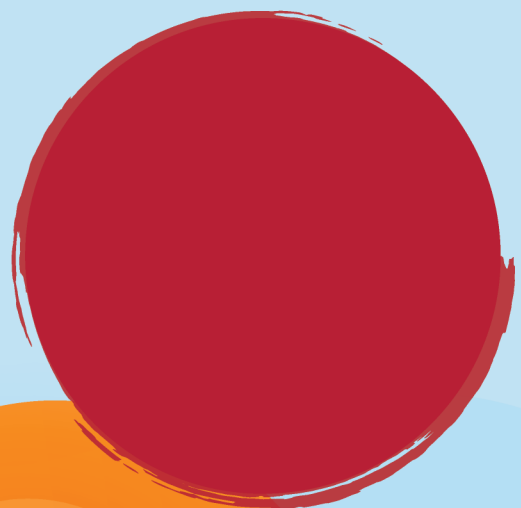


HOW TO REBRAND UKRAINE IN JAPAN AND VICE VERSA?





Analytical
commentary

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REBRANDING UKRAINE IN JAPAN

In recent years, Ukraine has significantly intensified its public diplomacy, resulting in a certain improvement in Ukraine's image and a successful communication of the state's position abroad. However, it is fair to say that at present not all attempts deliver the expected results. This is partly due to the fact that Ukrainian public diplomacy seeks to send attractive messages, without adapting the content and methods of presentation to the outlook of the local audience. At the same time, the success of public diplomacy largely depends on understanding of local specifics. For qualitative adaptation, first of all, it is necessary to conduct a thorough analysis of the perception of Ukraine's image.

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The Japanese audience has a special worldview and way of perceiving the specifics of other countries based on its history and subcultures (experts in this field are particularly assiduous in studying objects of foreign culture and applying them to their creative works, such as comics (*manga*), cartoons (*anime*) or computer games), art, traditional and modern values and the influence of geographical and geopolitical location. These factors filter new information coming from other countries to Japan. As a result, when other countries try to

demonstrate their achievements in the best way possible, they sometimes fail to get the expected result.

The need to improve Ukraine's public diplomacy was confirmed during the "Asia Strategy in Action. The Role of Ukraine-Japan Cooperation" forum, organized by the New Europe Center in Kyiv on February 16, 2021¹. Mr. Volodymyr Sheiko, Director General of the Ukrainian Institute, announced the results of the study on the perception of Ukraine in Japan based on interviews with experts. His conclusion is that, **in general, Japan lacks knowledge of Ukraine**. According to him, there are no things that the Japanese would necessarily associate with the country; therefore, Ukraine not only needs to rectify negative stereotypes or insults. Rather, it generally has the room to offer its positive image to the Japanese. Proceeding from this point, the priority is to find effective ways of representing Ukraine in Japan, using the results of the analysis of Ukraine's perception and taking into account the local specificities.

I reckon, however, that in this regard it is important to find common ground between Ukrainians and the Japanese whilst also avoiding stereotypes, which can be effective points of contact to arouse strong affinity for Ukrainians among the Japanese.

¹ "Asia Strategy in Action. The Role of Ukraine-Japan Cooperation" forum. <http://neweurope.org.ua/forum-azijska-strategiya-v-diyi-rol-ukrayinsko-yaponskoyi-spivpratsi/>



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In my opinion, the term “European Ukraine” could be an example to understand the difference in perception between the audiences of Ukraine and Japan. The term is totally truthful and historically fair for Ukrainians; it is well-received by the Japanese as well². At the same time, it is important to understand that whereas Europe as a whole has a perception close to the consensus on the term “Europe,” citizens of non-European countries, such as Japan, often do not share this understanding. For most ordinary Japanese, the word “European” is not always associated with concepts such as “democratic,” “free,” or “advanced,” but rather evokes images such as “beautiful,” “cultured / fashionable” and “historical.”³

² According to a 2019 survey of the Cabinet Office of Japan on diplomacy, 65.3 percent of respondents said that they had a positive attitude towards Europe. In comparison, the number of the Japanese with a favorable opinion of the U.S. stood at 78.7 percent, Russia – 20.8 percent, Southeast Asia – 61.6 percent, of India – 45.6 percent.

³ For instance, the team of Keio University led by Shibuya Akiko reported that, in accordance with their survey, Japanese respondents described European countries, France and Italy, as “fashionable” (68.6 and 57.4 percent, respectively), “culturally rich” (48.9 and 41.9 percent, respectively), “countries with ancient history” (34.5 and 35 percent, respectively), “traditional” (31.8 and 25.8 percent, respectively) rather than “free” (25.4 and 27.7, respectively) and “progressive” (25.1 and 14.2 percent, respectively). At the same time, the latter two traits are more frequently ascribed to the U.S., with “free” standing at 66.8 percent and “progressive” amounting to 60.4 percent. (Shibuya Akiko, Tay Seow Boon, E Gwangho, Kamise Yumiko, Hagiwra Shigeru & Koshiro Eiko (2011). *Multi-cultural experiences and media stereotypes of foreign countries and their people: a report of the web monitor survey in February 2010 (part 2) [in Japanese]*, Keio media and communications research (61), 103-125, 2011-03).

In this respect, when promoting Ukraine’s image in Japan, it is worth realizing the possibility that the emphasis on the fact that Ukraine is Europe may evoke a certain affinity but will not be able to make the intended impression on the Japanese. Therefore, for high-quality rebranding, Ukraine needs to specifically decompose and select key elements of “Europeanness” of Ukrainians for the Japanese, such as “freedom” or “democracy,” that are common values for both our countries. For example, more specific images, such as “Ukraine is a free country” or “Ukraine is a democratic country,” can arouse more understanding and lead to the country’s favorable image in the Japanese information space, as against simply positioning it as “European.”

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One of the fine common features of Ukrainians and the Japanese is the skillfulness of Ukrainians, noticeable in some cultural and economic fields. Japan has a long history of respect and love for the exquisite, detailed and high-precision work in art and industry, whose elements are still visible in various areas of modern Japan. It is for this reason that Ukrainian products, such as exquisite and various embroidery, mechanical models, like UGear, and software applications have their supporters in Japanese expert circles. Such things can arouse further



● UGears. Photo: <https://ugears.ua/>

deep respect and affinity in Japan, whilst also conveying an impression that Ukrainians have a similar trait **(Embroidered Ukraine / the country of embroidery, the country of craftsmen, the country of skilled IT specialists, etc.)**⁴.

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During the forum, Ms. Olga Khomenko, PhD, an expert on Japan, noted the importance to pay attention to the commitment of the Japanese people to the antiquity of history. The current understanding of most Japanese that Ukraine is a young country is not entirely conducive to promoting the country's positive image. This is due to the fact that the Japanese, like any other nation,

first of all compare the histories of other countries with that of their own to form an idea of the depth of the country. Unfortunately, however, there is a widespread understanding in Japan that Russia is the successor to Kyivan Rus because of long-standing efforts of local Russian historians or, at least, that Rus is the common place of origin of East Slavs. Therefore, one of the goals of public diplomacy should be to focus on spreading the idea that Ukraine has a thousand-year history. In this case, it is necessary to ensure the accompaniment with bright visualized materials that strengthen the understanding of Ukrainian history, starting from Rus up to the Cossack era, the UPR and independence, which would embrace the history of Crimea as its intrinsic element. The history of granting autocephaly to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine in 2019 could also help raise awareness of Ukrainian history.

It should be remembered that the East Slavic origin of Ukraine could be of special interest to the Japanese, who are fond of exoticism that, from their point of view, has ancient and unique roots **(Exotic Ukraine / the Pearl of Central and Eastern Europe)**.

⁴ "The Potential of Healthcare Technology in Little-Known Great IT Country – Ukraine"; webinar organized by the Japan International Cooperation Agency on February 25, 2021.



Things like Kupala Night, *didukh* or pre-Christian Ukrainian mythology can be potentially attractive for the Japanese, who also have many similar elements in the mythology of their national religion, Shinto, although many Japanese do not consider themselves religious. For instance, it might be effective to look for common features in the concept of Lesia Ukrainka's *Forest Song* based on Ukrainian pre-Christian mythology. Another example is the book *Magic Beings of the Ukrainian Myth. Spirits of Nature* by Dara Korniy (Kharkiv, 2018), which might be considered one of the successful examples of showing the diverse Ukrainian worldview.

In the course of the forum, Mr. Sheiko noted that the Japanese still associated Ukraine with the war against Russia and Crimea. In fact, following the occupation of Crimea in 2014, many Japanese began to pay more attention to Ukraine. Most of them reject Russian territorial claims

on the peninsula and rightly believe that Crimea is Ukraine. Nonetheless, at present, Ukraine more often spreads slogans like "Crimea is Ukraine" on social networks instead of conducting large-scale awareness-raising projects so that foreigners, including the Japanese, could broaden the understanding in their own languages of why Crimea is Ukraine and stop limiting it solely to the international legal aspect – all the more so that in Japan, the vast majority of books on the history of Crimea are written by local Russologists, whose works are markedly influenced by the Russian historical narrative. Therefore, to promote the true image of Ukraine by using the heightened attention of the Japanese to Crimea, it is extremely important to provide information in the Japanese language about the true history of the peninsula, given that in Japan the practice of studying the history of other countries is quite common.



● Ivan Kupala Day. Photo: <https://ukraine.ua/imagebank/>

In order to promote the true image of Ukraine by using the heightened attention of the Japanese to Crimea, it is extremely important to provide information in the Japanese language about the true history of the peninsula, given that in Japan the practice of studying the history of other countries is quite common.

In so doing, I believe that it is necessary to emphasize the history of the Crimean Khanate and the indigenous people, the Crimean Tatars, who themselves are powerful actors of this region's history. An important factor in this regard is that the leaders of the Crimean Tatars have firm pro-Ukrainian convictions. If the Japanese audience finds out that there was a mighty local state in Crimea, that

the peninsula is, above all, home to the Crimean Tatars and that the Russian Empire only conquered it later, Ukraine will be able to strengthen its position on Crimea not only in accordance with international law but also through historical justice (**strengthening the idea "Crimea is Ukraine"**). One of the brightest embodiments of this idea is the video product made within the framework of the information project "Znau" and distributed by the Embassy of Ukraine in Japan in February 2021⁵, it is in need of a high-quality Japanese translation. It would also be effective to translate scientific books on the history of Crimea into Japanese, such as Paul Robert Magocsi's *This Blessed Land: Crimea and the Crimean Tatars* (Toronto, 2014), *History of Crimea and the Crimean Tatars* by Hulnara Bekirova and others (Kyiv, 2020), etc. In addition,



● *Crimea is Ukraine.*
Photo: <https://ukraine.ua/imagebank/>

⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/ukr.embassy.japan/posts/1603204359881049>



deepening the knowledge of the Japanese about Crimea could have an additional positive side effect. This will result in the image of “**Tolerant Ukraine**” and “**Diverse Ukraine**” due to the fact that such elements are now important for promoting the country’s positive image in the international arena.

Another distinctive feature of the Japanese is their interest in other peoples’ cuisine. For the vast majority of the Japanese, any trip is traditionally associated with the opportunity of tasting unfamiliar local flavors. Thus, culinary diplomacy is a promising tool for Ukraine, and the country’s cuisine is worth presenting in Japanese with visual materials emphasizing its diversity, including the existence of subcategories such as Galician, Zakarpattia, Odesa

(+ Bessarabian), Crimean, Jewish and other cuisines as well as of different local flavors (“**Delicious Ukraine**”). This image could also be marvelously combined with positioning the country as a world center of agricultural goods with an emphasis on *chornozem*. Of equal importance is to take into account the interest of the Japanese in seafood and explore opportunities of attracting the Japanese by the fact that Ukraine also has access to the sea and, therefore, a cuisine abundant in marine products (**Ukraine – a sea country**).

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● Borsch. Traditional Ukrainian beet soup. Photo: <https://ukraine.ua/imagebank/>

Besides, it may be of particular concern for the Japanese, particularly those familiar with the situation in the post-Soviet space, to know that Ukraine is fighting against the Soviet past and is trying to carry out numerous structural reforms, such as those in the fields of justice and anti-corruption, with a view to building a successful state like Japan. It is also important that good governance through such reforms is one of the vital criteria for a successful soft power. At the same time, it may be effective to spotlight the differences of Ukrainian and Russian societies, with the latter still facing a gaping lack of free choice and freedom of speech as well as violations of fundamental human rights; these issues are well covered in Japan. In general, such unforced differentiation could contribute to the recognizability of Ukraine among the Japanese in every field.

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It is necessary to avoid erroneous perception of some Japanese features. For example, the stereotypical description of “hard-working Japanese” is now not always considered a common, if at all beneficial, feature of the local population. These years, Japan’s leading companies are changing their internal working rules so that their employees do not work late hours. There is also the well-known social phenomenon of *hikikomori* (a person who does not want to socialize and work, lives at home and is financially dependent on his or her family members), which has long been a major problem in the country. Therefore, maximizing the effect of public diplomacy

requires looking for common features understandable by the general public, whilst also trying to avoid their possible negative interpretations.

The implementation of the high-quality and successful rebranding of Ukraine and promotion of its renewed positive image can only be ensured through high-quality communication based on a proper command of the Japanese language with a profound understanding of problems of translation from Ukrainian, polite and friendly speech, as well as close and daily communication with local people through social networks, such as Twitter (**Amiable Ukraine**). It should be born in mind that many slogans that sound good in Ukrainian will not render the same effect after translation into Japanese; therefore, it is often better to avoid literal translations from Ukrainian or English. Instead, new phrases could be coined from scratch in Japanese, with due regard for a possible audience feedback and crucial elements of original content.

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Nonetheless, it is worth paying attention to the ways of Russia’s public diplomacy in Japan. The Embassy of the Russian Federation in Japan often follows only instructions from Moscow on social networks. Not only does it not arouse



much affinity but is sometimes infuriating for the Japanese, despite the fact that Embassy's posts are written in proficient Japanese. Therefore, importance should be attached not only to the technical issues like language skills but also to the flexible way of communication and behavior of diplomats towards the local population.

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REBRANDING JAPAN IN UKRAINE

The task of rebranding Japan in Ukraine significantly differs from Ukraine's tasks in Japan. The biggest problem for Japan in promoting its image in Ukraine is that the Japanese side currently fails to cater for the information needs of Ukrainian society while old stereotypes remain in the perception of the local population. Nowadays, **there are reasons to believe that Japan is not living up to its full soft power potential in Ukraine.** However, it is important that there is a serious demand in Ukrainian society for truthful information and knowledge about Japan. Therefore, Japan undoubtedly faces the task to meet the demand of Ukrainian society to the best extent possible by ensuring a significant increase in the amount of information about Japan in the Ukrainian language. At the same time, the activities and dissemination of information should not necessarily be limited only to the cultural sphere; rather, it is necessary to convey information about various features of the country, be they positive or negative, objective or subjective.

Japan undoubtedly faces the task to meet the demand of Ukrainian society to the best extent possible by ensuring a significant increase in the amount of information about Japan in the Ukrainian language.

In this process, an important function of the Embassy of Japan is not only to disseminate information independently but also to support the efforts of Ukrainians, for instance, bloggers, who today are already disseminating unique information about Japan in the Ukrainian language. Such experts are often not known in society due to lack of resources to share their information products. Therefore, the embassy should analyze which authors / bloggers / YouTubers write or tell about Japan in Ukrainian (or Russian) on the Internet or in various media and come up with a mechanism to support their activities. Obviously, such Ukrainians will be the best advocates for the implementation of Japanese soft power in Ukraine. Most importantly, they can reach into the soul of the Ukrainian audience better than the Embassy of Japan.

It would also be useful if the embassy could support the activities of such bloggers in the following manner: for example, a Japanese diplomat could invite them for a conversation to discuss their activities and jointly seek ways and forms of mutually beneficial cooperation. In the future, it would be effective if the embassy announced a monthly contest of blogs or videos about Japan and facilitated the creation of a website where all the interested could conveniently access various information products of Ukrainian Japan specialists. Regular announcements of the best content about Japan could motivate local experts to publish high-quality and insightful materials, while also sparking public and media attention to them and the embassy's initiative itself. As a consequence, a synergy of efforts of all those willing and interested in this process



● *Kiyomizudera Temple, Kyoto. Photo: <https://www.japan.travel/en/spot/2199/>*



could be expected, resulting in growing amounts of information about Japan in Ukraine.

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In this respect, it would be useful to explore what stereotypes about Japan are prevalent in Ukrainian society. Stereotypical vision naturally prevents people from acquiring new knowledge about Japan; thus, perchance, it might be worth looking for ways to purposefully debunk them in the information field by publishing in-depth analytical reports (a possible topic could be, for instance, “Are the Japanese really that weird / hardworking / secretive?”).

It is also critical to provide Ukrainians with an opportunity of visiting Japan as often as possible, form their own impressions and thoughts and share them after returning to Ukraine or during their stay in Japan. To this end, it could be effective to disseminate information on how easy it is to travel in Japan on your own. Most Ukrainians have a prejudiced opinion that Japan is a closed, expensive and not that easily accessible country. This is largely due to the lack of reliable information in Ukrainian society and the consequences of long-standing stereotypes. It would therefore be preferable to ensure the dissemination of information among Ukrainian citizens

about the cost of flights, ways of receiving Japanese visas at the Embassy of Japan without difficulties, easy ways of traveling without knowledge of the Japanese language, the amount of money needed per day for a trip to Japan (accommodation, food, transport, souvenirs), etc., to overcome the psychological barrier Ukrainians have when it comes to traveling to Japan.

Another key task for Japan in Ukraine is to enhance its information visibility, openness and sociability so that as many Ukrainian citizens as possible can feel close to Japan on a daily basis. An important part of this is the way of speaking. Most Ukrainians enjoy stories delivered in a laid-back manner. Diplomatic language automatically acts a psychological barrier between the people and the country and is not always an efficient way to promote, in this case, Japan’s soft power in Ukraine.



ABOUT NEW EUROPE CENTER

The New Europe Center was founded in 2017 as an independent think-tank. Despite its new brand, it is based on a research team that has been working together since 2009, at the Institute for World Policy. The New Europe Center became recognized by offering high-quality analysis on foreign policy issues in Ukraine and regional security by combining active, effective work with advocacy.

The New Europe Center's vision is very much in line with the views of the majority of Ukrainians about the future of their country: Ukraine should be integrated into the European Union and NATO. By integration, we understand not so much formal membership as the adoption of the best standards and practices for Ukraine to properly belong to the Euroatlantic value system.

More about New Europe Center: neweurope.org.ua

